

**POLICY REGARDING OPENING INVOCATIONS
BEFORE MEETINGS OF THE GREENFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

WHEREAS, the Greenfield City Council (“the Council”) is an elected legislative and deliberative public body, serving the citizens of Greenfield, Ohio; and

WHEREAS, the Council has long maintained a tradition of solemnizing its proceedings by allowing for an opening prayer before each meeting, for the benefit and blessing of the Council; and

WHEREAS, the Council wishes to maintain a tradition of solemnizing its proceedings by allowing for an opening prayer before each meeting, for the benefit and blessing of the Council; and

WHEREAS, the Council now desires to adopt this formal, written policy to clarify and codify its invocation practices; and

WHEREAS, our country’s Founders recognized that we possess certain rights that cannot be awarded, surrendered, nor corrupted by human power, and the Founders explicitly attributed the origin of these, our inalienable rights, to a Creator. These rights ultimately ensure the self-government manifest in our Council, upon which we desire to invoke divine guidance and blessing; and

WHEREAS, such prayer before deliberative public bodies has been consistently upheld as constitutional by American courts, including the United States Supreme Court; and

WHEREAS, in *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983), the United States Supreme Court rejected a challenge to the Nebraska Legislature’s practice of opening each day of its sessions with a prayer by a chaplain paid with taxpayer dollars, and specifically concluded, “The opening of sessions of legislative and other deliberative public bodies with prayer is deeply embedded in the history and tradition of this country. From colonial times through the founding of the Republic and ever since, the practice of legislative prayer has coexisted with the principles of disestablishment and religious freedom.” *Id.*, at 786; and

WHEREAS, the Council desires to avail itself of the Supreme Court’s recognition that it is constitutionally permissible for a public body to “invoke divine guidance” on its work. *Id.*, at 792. Such invocation “is not, in these circumstances, an ‘establishment’ of religion or a step toward establishment; it is simply a tolerable acknowledgment of beliefs widely held among the people of this country.” *Id.*; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court affirmed in *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668 (1984), “Our history is replete with official references to the value and invocation of Divine guidance in deliberations and pronouncements of the Founding Fathers and contemporary leaders.” *Id.*, at 675; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court further stated, that “government acknowledgments of religion serve, in the only ways reasonably possible in our culture, the legitimate secular purposes of solemnizing public occasions, expressing confidence in the future, and encouraging the recognition of what is worthy of appreciation in society. For that reason, and because of their history and ubiquity, those practices are not understood as conveying government approval of particular religious beliefs.” *Id.*, at 693 (O’Connor, J., concurring); and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court also famously observed in *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306, (1952), “We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.” *Id.*, at 313-14; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court acknowledged in *Holy Trinity Church v. United States*, 143 U.S. 457 (1892), that the American people have long followed a “custom of opening sessions of all deliberative bodies and most conventions with prayer...,” *Id.*, at 471; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court has determined, “The content of [such] prayer is not of concern to judges where . . . there is no indication that the prayer opportunity has been exploited to proselytize or advance any one, or to disparage any other, faith or belief.” *Marsh*, 463 U.S. at 794-795; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court also proclaimed that it should not be the job of the courts or deliberative public bodies “to embark on a sensitive evaluation or to parse the content of a particular prayer” offered before a deliberative public body. *Id.*; and

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court has counseled against the efforts of government officials to affirmatively screen, censor, prescribe and/or proscribe the specific content of public prayers offered by private speakers, as such government efforts would violate the First Amendment rights of those speakers. *See, e.g., Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 588-589 (1992); and

WHEREAS, in *Simpson v. Chesterfield County Bd. of Supervisors*, 404 F.3d 276 (4th Cir. 2004), *cert. denied*, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit recently reviewed and specifically approved as constitutional the prayer policy of a county board, and made a number of key findings about said policy; and

WHEREAS, the Council is not bound by decisions of the Fourth Circuit, but hereby acknowledges the general guidance provided by the most important of that court’s findings in *Simpson*, including the facts that the policy there:

(1) Allowed for invocations for the benefit of the legislative body itself “rather than for the individual leading the invocation or for those who might also be present,” *Id.*, at 284; and

(2) Established a practice in which various clergy in the county’s religious community were invited on a rotating basis to present invocations before meetings of the board, *Id.*, at 279; and

(3) Thus, "made plain that [the county board] was not affiliated with any one specific faith" by allowing different persons from different religious convictions and backgrounds to offer the invocations. *Id.*, at 286; and

WHEREAS, the Fourth Circuit showed little concern that the prayers before board meetings in *Simpson* were "traditionally made to a divinity that is consistent with the Judeo-Christian tradition," *Id.*, at 280, because "*Marsh* also considered, and found constitutionally acceptable, the fact that the prayers in question fit broadly within 'the Judeo-Christian tradition.'" *Id.*, at 283 (quoting *Marsh*, 463 U.S. at 793); and

WHEREAS, the Fourth Circuit's ruling in *Simpson* can be distinguished from its earlier decision in *Wynne v. Town of Great Falls*, 376 F.3d 292 (4th Cir. 2002), *cert. denied*, where a town Board "improperly 'exploited' a 'prayer opportunity' to 'advance' one religion over others." *Id.*, at 298 (quoting *Marsh*, 463 U.S. at 794); and

WHEREAS, the Council intends to avoid all of the unique circumstances that rendered the practices at issue in *Wynne* unconstitutional, including the facts that:

(1) The Town Council's resolution declared its intent that "the Town's prayers are not just for the Council members but for all of the Town's citizens," and thus prayers were "directed at" the citizenry, *Wynne*, 376 F.3d at 301, n.7; and

(2) The Town Council "steadfastly refused" to invoke any "deity associated with any specific faith other than Christianity," *Id.*, at 300, n.5; and

(3) The Town Council "advance[d] its own religious views in preference to all others," *Id.*, at 302; and

(4) Town Council members publicly chided and "ostracized" those who refused to participate in their prayers, *Id.*, at 298; and

WHEREAS, the Council intends, and has intended in past practice, to adopt a policy that does not proselytize or advance any faith, or show any purposeful preference of one religious view to the exclusion of others; and

WHEREAS, the Council recognizes its constitutional duty to interpret, construe, and amend its policies and ordinances to comply with constitutional requirements as they are announced; and

WHEREAS, the Council accepts as binding the applicability of general principles of law and all the rights and obligations afforded under the United States and Ohio Constitutions and statutes.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Greenfield City Council that the Council hereby adopts the following written policy regarding opening invocations before meetings of the Council, to wit:

- I. In order to solemnize proceedings of the Council, it is the tradition of the Council to allow for an invocation or prayer to be offered before its meetings (including its regular Council meetings, and those of its committees and subcommittees), for the benefit of its members.
- II. The invocation shall not be listed or recognized as an agenda item for the meeting or as part of the business of the public.
- III. No member or employee of the Council or any other person in attendance at the meeting shall be required to participate in any invocation that is offered.
- IV. The invocation at each meeting shall be voluntarily delivered by one individual (hereinafter the “Invocation Speaker”). To ensure that the Invocation Speaker is selected from among a wide pool of individuals, the Invocation Speaker may be an eligible religious leader from the local community, scheduled pursuant to the procedure set forth in section V herein below, or alternatively, the Invocation Speaker may be a member of the Council or the Mayor, scheduled pursuant to the procedure set forth in section VI herein below.
- V. *Invocation Speaker: Local religious leader*

A. The invocation may be voluntarily delivered by an eligible member of the clergy in the City of Greenfield. To ensure that each individual is selected from among a wide pool of the city’s clergy, on a rotating basis, such Invocation Speaker shall be selected according to the following procedure:

1. The Clerk to the Greenfield City Council and/or his or her designee (hereinafter “the Clerk”) shall compile and maintain a database (the “Congregations List”) of the various religious congregations with an established presence in the local community of City of Greenfield.
2. The Congregations List shall be compiled by referencing the listing for “churches,” “congregations,” or other religious assemblies in the annual Yellow Pages phone book(s) published for Greenfield, research from the Internet, and consultation with any local chamber of commerce. All religious congregations with an established presence in the local community of Greenfield are eligible to be included in the Congregations List, and any such congregation can confirm its inclusion by specific written request to the Clerk.
3. The Congregations List shall also include the name and contact information of any chaplain who may serve one or more of the fire departments or law enforcement agencies of Greenfield.
4. The Congregations List shall be updated, by reasonable efforts of the Clerk, in November of each calendar year.

5. Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this policy, and on or about December 1 of each calendar year thereafter, the Clerk shall mail an invitation addressed to the “religious leader” of each congregation listed on the Congregations List, as well as to the individual chaplains included on the Congregations List.

6. The invitation shall be dated at the top of the page, signed by the Clerk at the bottom of the page, and read as follows:

Dear religious leader,

The Greenfield City Council makes it a policy to invite members of the clergy in Greenfield to voluntarily offer a prayer before the beginning of its meetings, for the benefit and blessing of the Council. As leader of one of the religious congregations with an established presence in the local community, or in your capacity as a chaplain for one of the local fire departments or law enforcement agencies, you are eligible to offer this important service at an upcoming meeting of the Council.

If you are willing to assist the Council in this regard, please send a written reply at your earliest convenience to the Clerk to the Council at the address included on this letterhead. Clergy are scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis. The dates of the Council’s scheduled meetings (for the full Council and committees) for the upcoming year are listed on the following, attached page. If you have a preference among the dates, please state that request in your written reply.

This opportunity is voluntary, and you are free to offer the invocation according to the dictates of your own conscience. To maintain a spirit of respect and ecumenism, the Council requests only that the prayer opportunity not be exploited as an effort to convert others to the particular faith of the invocation speaker, nor to disparage any faith or belief different than that of the invocation speaker.

On behalf of the Greenfield City Council, I thank you in advance for considering this invitation.

*Sincerely,
Clerk to the Council*

7. As the invitation letter indicates, the respondents to the invitation shall be scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis to deliver the prayers.

- B. No Invocation Speaker shall receive compensation for his or her service.
- C. The Clerk shall make every reasonable effort to ensure that a variety of eligible Invocation Speakers are scheduled for the Council meetings. In any event, no Invocation Speaker shall be scheduled to offer a prayer at consecutive meetings of the Council, or at more than three (3) Council meetings in any calendar year.
- D. Neither the Council nor the Clerk shall engage in any prior inquiry, review of, or involvement in, the content of any prayer to be offered by an Invocation Speaker.

VI. *Invocation Speaker: Council member*

- A. In the event that no eligible member of the clergy in the City of Greenfield has volunteered to deliver the invocation at a particular meeting, after following the efforts and pursuant to the procedure provided in Section V herein above, the invocation may be delivered by a single Council member or the Mayor, pursuant to a regularly rotating schedule among all Council members and the Mayor who may voluntarily choose to participate in the rotational list.
- B. The Council member or the Mayor whose turn it is in the rotation shall deliver the invocation in his or her capacity as a private citizen, and according to the dictates of his or her own conscience.
- C. No guidelines or limitations shall be issued regarding an invocation's content, except that the Council shall request by the language of this policy that no prayer should proselytize or advance any faith, or disparage the religious faith or non-religious views of others.
- D. No other member(s) of the Council shall engage in any prior inquiry, review of, or involvement in, the content of any invocation to be offered by the scheduled Council member or Mayor.
- E. Neither the Mayor nor any Council member shall receive supplemental compensation of any kind for providing the invocation.
- F. Following the rotational list shall ensure that no individual Council member may be scheduled to offer an invocation at consecutive meetings of the Council.

VII. Shortly before the opening gavel that officially begins the Council meeting and the agenda/business of the public, the Council President shall introduce the scheduled Invocation Speaker and the person selected to recite the Pledge of Allegiance following the invocation, and invite only those who wish to do so to stand for those observances of and for the Board.

VIII. This set of rules is not intended, and shall not be implemented or construed in any way, to affiliate the Council with, nor express the Council's preference for, any faith or religious denomination. Rather, these rules are intended to acknowledge and express the Council's

respect for the diversity of religious denominations and faiths represented and practiced among the citizens of Greenfield.

IX. To clarify the Council’s intentions, as stated herein above, the following disclaimer shall be included in at least 10 point font at the bottom of any printed Council meeting agenda: “Any invocation that may be offered before the official start of the Council meeting shall be the voluntary offering of a private citizen, to and for the benefit of the Council. The views or beliefs expressed by the invocation speaker have not been previously reviewed or approved by the Council, and the Council does not endorse the religious beliefs or views of this, or any other speaker.”

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this policy shall become effective immediately upon adoption by the Council.

THUS INTRODUCED at the regular meeting of the City Council of Greenfield, Ohio, on _____, 2007.

For: _____

Against: _____

THUS ADOPTED at the regular meeting of the City Council of Greenfield, Ohio, on _____, 2007.

CLERK

CHAIR of COUNCIL